Early years apps approved to help families kick start learning at home

Parents are set to benefit from new technology to support their children learning at home, with 6 new apps available to improve reading, writing and speaking.

Following a competition to find the best educational apps for parents to engage young children in learning at home, a panel of experts has approved 6 with a focus on early literacy, language and communication.

These apps cover activities ranging from interactive story books, handwriting exercises using Artificial Intelligence, and educational video games.

The technology announcement comes as new data reveals three quarters of children aged five and under have used smartphone or tablet apps at least once in the last six months to learn.

The 6 apps – published on the Hungry Little Minds website – are part of the government's drive to help parents make informed decisions about the use of technology in creating positive learning environments at home.

The expert panel who accredited the apps, chaired by Professor Jackie Marsh of the University of Sheffield and appointed by the Department for Education, included children's digital media consultants, early learning charities and researchers at universities.

Education Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

> The first few years of a child's life are crucial in equipping them with the skills needed for the classroom, and we are working with families to make it easier to weave early learning into daily activities.

> We know that the majority of families are using technology in fun and visual ways to support their child's early education, but it can be difficult for busy parents to work out what content is best.

> This list of expert-approved apps helps them make confident decisions that benefit their child's language and literacy skills.

The approved apps all meet agreed criteria, including elements of play, interaction and ranging levels of difficulty. The list of accredited apps builds on the Hungry Little Minds campaign, by helping parents across England choose from hundreds of apps already available on the market.

The 6 apps published on the Hungry Little Minds website include:

- Lingumi (For children aged 2-5): Sets of learning games, speech recognition games and video-based games to help with a child's grammar and getting them speaking their first words early on.

- Kaligo (For children aged 3-5): The first digital handwriting exercise book using a stylus and tablet, built using AI and co-created with teachers, occupational therapists and neuroscientists.

- Phonics Hero (For school-aged children): Over 850 fun, varied and motivating games take a child step-by-step through the 44 sounds, the reading and spelling of words, and how to conquer sentences.

- Teach Your Monster to Read (For school-aged children): Covers the first two years of learning to read, from matching letters and sounds to enjoying little books, designed in collaboration with leading academics.

- Navigo Game (For school-aged children): Focuses on developing skills that underpin reading, including phonics, letters and sounds, designed by UCL Institute of Education and Fish in a Bottle.

- Fonetti (For school-aged children): The world's first 'Listening Bookshop' interacting with children by giving visual cues in real-time as they read aloud and highlighting where the most support is needed.

Chair of the expert panel Professor Jackie Marsh, Professor of Education at University of Sheffield, said:

The panel is delighted with the approved apps, as they all offer valuable opportunities to support children's early literacy development. Apps that are of most educational value to children contain a number of features, such as a design which makes the app easy to use and also offers guidance and support for parents, enabling the content to be adjusted for individual children. Apps should also be engaging and fun to use, with clear learning goals and the use of feedback that can be reassuring and motivating for children. All of the approved apps contain these features, and we are confident that they can have a positive impact on children's early literacy learning.

Jonathan Douglas, Director at the National Literacy Trust, said:

Early language skills are the foundation of all literacy and

learning and parents have a uniquely powerful role in developing these skills in their children through talking and reading together. Technology is now such a powerful component of the home that it's important to recognise the powerful resource it can be in enriching these interactions. We believe that the apps which we have chosen will help parents feed their children's hungry little minds with great stories, exciting and fun experience of language and offer the support for the early reading experiences which provide the foundation for a lifetime of learning.

In new research published today by the Department for Education, early education at age two for disadvantaged children is found to have a positive impact on their speaking ability, with learning at home contributing to this.

Over half of parents surveyed (52%) say they played pretend games together or took turns playing fun activities with their child every day.

The data highlights the important work by the government to tackle the barriers some parents face in supporting their child's learning at home, including time, confidence and ideas of things to do.

The Hungry Little Minds campaign gives parents access to video tips, advice and suggested games to help with early learning for their children from age 0 to five.

This also includes work with businesses and organisations offering a range of initiatives to drive vital early skills, part of a national, society-wide effort.

The campaign is one part of the government's work to give every child the best start in life, adding to a record investment in childcare and early years education — reaching £3.6 billion in 2020-21 — and giving parents the flexibility they need to be able to balance their work and family lives.